

Materials and Instructions for the “Speed-Dating” Activity for Forming Small Groups

A unique method of forming small groups in a university setting through a fun, interactive activity based on the classic “speed-dating” exercise

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“Speed-Dating” Activity Guidelines for Course Instructor

Activity Format and Structure

The “speed-dating” (i.e., speed-interviewing) activity is a group formation strategy that allows groups to form based on similar topic interests and work styles. This time-efficient method provides a controlled technique for students to discuss topic interests in class. The total duration of the activity depends on the total number of students in the class and ranges from 45 minutes to 2 hours. This activity is best suited for small classes (i.e., fewer than 40 students).

Students wear nametags and are provided a list of their classmates’ names. During each one-on-one speed-interview or “date,” students discuss their topic interests with each other for one minute. The instructor serves as the timekeeper and announces when it is time to switch partners after the one-minute timer concludes for each interview.

During or immediately following each conversation, students write brief notes about each student they interview on the provided preference sheet. The “Speed-Dating” Activity Preference Sheets for Students includes the names of all students, a column for notes, and a column for indicating immediate preference of each person as a group project member (i.e., Yes/No/Maybe). During the interviews, the students are encouraged to write notes and their initial reactions for each person, paying special attention to project topic and ideas.

This process concludes once every student had interviewed every other student in the class. After completing all interviews, students return to their seats and independently review their notes to complete the second page of the preference sheet that provides space for students to indicate their four most-desired selections and up to four least-desired selections with rationale. Instructors should remind students they should emphasize project ideas and topics.

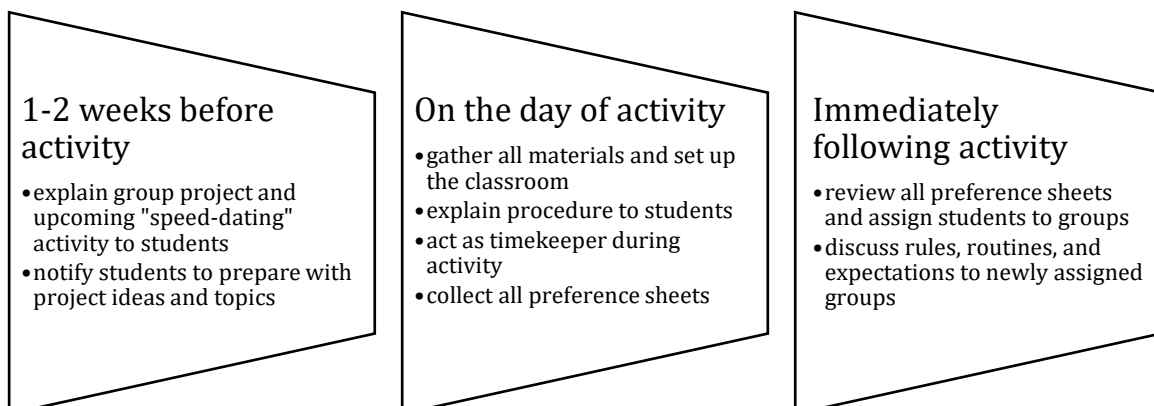


Figure 1. Timeline of Implementing “Speed-Dating” Activity

Pre-Activity Preparation

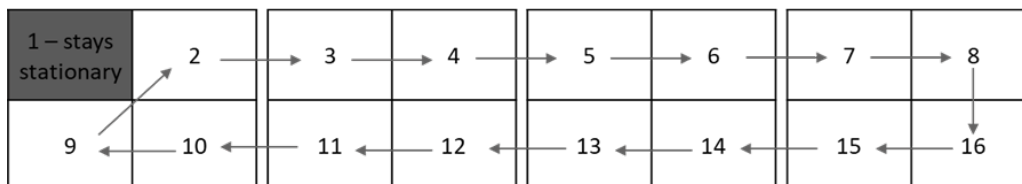
1. **Describe group project and “speed-dating” activity 1-2 weeks prior.** Explain the group project assignment along with its purpose and objectives for the class before the synchronous meeting during which students will engage in the “speed-dating” activity. Have students prepare for the activity by reading the assignment instructions and writing a list of their topic ideas/interest, scheduling conflicts, task-completion styles, preferred communication methods, and other details that can affect their participation in a collaborative project.

Below is an example script and suggestions for explaining the “speed-dating” activity to students 1-2 weeks prior to activity.

We are going to have a group project this semester, and we will be forming those groups over the next few weeks. Next week, in class, you will have the opportunity to meet one-on-one with each student in class to share individual project ideas and topics. This activity will be like the classic ‘speed-dating’ trope that is often presented in movies or television shows. You will be given only one minute to quickly meet with each other. This will also give you a chance to introduce yourself and meet your fellow classmates and discuss project ideas and topics. Please come prepared next week to describe your individual project ideas and topic interests. It may help if you bring a hard copy of proposed ideas so that you can use this during the class activity.

2. **Gather all necessary materials.** The instructor should plan to provide the following materials for the students:
 - Name tags for each student to wear
 - Printed “Speed-Dating” Activity Preference Sheets for Students
3. **Arrange the classroom for the “speed-dating” activity.** The instructor should pre-determine the procedure and arrange the room accordingly. In cases where instructors want an open layout, instructors should strategically create a space unencumbered by the presence of physical obstacles like tables and chairs. The class may be moved to an open area on campus or they moved tables/chairs to the walls to allow for space in the center of the room.

In one example, the instructor can set up the classroom with tables and chairs, so the students move in a pre-determined order. In the example below, student 1 will stay stationary and all other students will move clockwise one seat. This pre-determined pattern ensures everyone will have a chance to have a one-on-one speed-interviewing session with each student in the class.



Special Considerations and Accommodations

Instructors may need to accommodate the activity in classes with students with disabilities (e.g., ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, mobility challenges). Allowing for more time for interviews and instructor-determined rotation procedures can address some of these accessibility concerns. Some instructors may feel the need to increase the time limit. We generally recommend one-minute durations for each speed-interview; however, some students indicated they would have preferred more time. We suggest no more than two minutes per interview to keep the original intent of the “speed-dating” activity to emphasize purposeful, efficient conversations.

Instructions to Explain the “Speed-Dating” Procedure

Below are suggestions for explaining the “speed-dating” activity to students immediately preceding the activity.

This activity provides you with an opportunity to meet with everyone in the class to share project ideas/topics. Here are the instructions for how the activity will proceed:

- Fill out and wear your name tags. Find a seat.
- You will have ONE minute to talk with each person. I will reset the timer after each conversation.
- Once the one-minute timer goes off, you will move clockwise to the next person, and so on until you have met with every student in the class.
- After all one-on-one meetings are completed, you will have time to fill out the second page of your preference sheet.
- Turn in a complete packet to me with your name. This is completely confidential, and only I will have access to your notes from this ‘speed-dating’ activity.
- Please remember to focus on topics and project ideas during your discussions.

Assignment of Groups based on Preferences

The instructor determines the groups by matching students based on their submitted four most-desired preferences. In instances where a student does not make anyone’s most-desired candidate list, instructors may review least-desired lists and the first page initial reactions columns (i.e., Yes/No/Maybe) to match these students to groups.

Developing Team Ground Rules after Group Assignment: "Rules, Routines, & Expectations" (RREs)

Immediately following group assignments, instructors should encourage newly assigned group members to agree on rules, routines, and expectations.

Below are suggestions for explaining ground rules to students.

All teams work better when they discuss and agree on how they want to hold meetings, make decisions, and interact with one another. Unfortunately, most teams simply let these processes evolve rather than proactively managing them. Use the questions below to establish some performance and communication ground rules for your group.

Suggested Ground Rules Categories:

- Will we have meetings outside of class times? If so, how often? What is the procedure for missing meetings? Who is responsible for following up after a missed meeting?
- What will we use to establish a schedule of tasks and deadlines? What are the expectations for a team member who cannot meet a deadline?
- How often are group members expected to check the Learning Management System? Campus email? GoogleDrive? GroupMe?
- How will group members settle disagreement among team members?
- How often during the project will the group revisit these RREs to make adjustments where needed?
- Are there any other rules or expectations we want to establish as a group?

Suggestions for Modifying “Speed-Dating” Activity for Online Delivery

Using this activity for group formation in an online class adds a layer of challenge since students cannot physically change seats and move about the room. Retaining the “speed-dating” activity for 100% online classes offers the same benefits for improving class dynamics, creating a sense of belonging, and fostering relationships and personal agency/ownership it can have in face-to-face classes. In a post-COVID classroom, where students are more comfortable with online course delivery systems, there is an opportunity to translate this activity to synchronous online classes. In addition, there is some evidence that online group projects support academic integrity as a mitigating strategy against cheating by increasing peer-accountability.

Below are suggestions for modifying the activity for online classes.

Pre-Activity Preparation for Online Classes

- Explain the group project assignment along with its purpose and objectives for the class before the synchronous meeting during which students will engage in the “speed-dating” activity. In an online class, especially, letting students know about the requirement of a group project early in the class helps students with busy schedules.
- At least one meeting before the activity, explain to students that they will be “speed-dating” as a strategy for group selection in a prior class session(s).
- Instruct students to ensure that their profile name is their preferred name and pronouns for accurate reference during the activity.
- Let students practice with breakout rooms and moving themselves into other rooms. It can help to have a video on hand with instructions for how to change rooms in your virtual meeting platform.
- Have students prepare for the activity class by reading the assignment instructions and writing a list of their topic ideas/interest, scheduling conflicts, task-completion styles, preferred communication methods, and other details that can affect their participation in a collaborative project.
- Direct students to have the “Speed-Dating” Activity Preference Sheets for Students available on the day of the activity, either as a printed document on which the students will hand-write their notes or digitally, open in a second window if the student is working from a laptop or computer that can manage typing in multiple windows. Explain that students should take notes during the activity to help them remember classmates with whom they form (dis)connections.
- Consider providing students with a pre-set list of question/discussion points relevant to your project that they can use during their speed-interviews.
- If you have not already, ensure that closed captioning is enabled for students who are deaf or hard of hearing before moving students into breakout rooms.

Instructions for Establishing and Practicing an Online Breakout Room Rotation

Establishing the rotations for breakout rooms can be tricky in an online environment because students are not moving about in a physical space. Pre-determine the number of breakout rooms you will need, allowing for THREE students in each room and create X number of breakout rooms so they are ready when the “speed-dating” activity begins; for example, a 30-student class will need 10 numbered breakout rooms. Using three students per room rather than the two used in face-to-face classes accounts for an odd number of students and for students who are logged in but not giving their attention to the class.

To establish and practice a rotation so that students meet others in the class and do not end up all in the same room or talking with the same persons the entire time, we recommend doing at least one breakout session practice round in which students determine the direction of their rotation. Explain to students that in their first “date,” they will each choose whether to Stay, Count-Down, or Count-Up as their rotation direction.

- **Students who select “Stay”** will always stay in the breakout room to which they are assigned when the official activity begins.
- **Students who select “Count-Down”** will move “down” in number after the timer runs out. For instance, if a student begins in Room 8, they will move to Room 7, then Room 6, then Room 5, etc.
- **Students who select “Count-Up”** will move “up” in number after the timer runs out. For instance, if a student begins in Room 3, they will move to Room 4, then Room 5, then Room 6, etc.

Let students know that they will keep this rotation direction the entire activity.

Before opening breakout rooms, remind students that the first “date” is only to establish the rotation pattern. Open the breakout rooms and randomly assign students into the rooms. Once students are in their first room, broadcast a message to the rooms to remind them that the initial goal is only to decide the “direction” each student will move: Stay, Count-Down, or Count-Up. For rooms with only two students, one student must choose “Stay” so that there is always a person occupying that room. Once students in that first “date” have decided how they will rotate, it is a good idea to do at least one practice rotation.

Instructions to Explain the “Speed-Dating” Procedure in an Online Delivery

Below is an example script for explaining the “speed-dating” activity to students immediately preceding the activity in an online delivery.

- Ensure that your profile name is your preferred name and pronouns for accurate reference during the activity.
- Where possible, turn both your microphone and camera on during the activity.
- When the activity begins, I will create random breakout rooms with THREE persons in them.

- You will have ONE minute to talk with each person. I will reset the timer after each conversation.
- Once the timer goes off, you will move to your next room, and so on until you have met with students in each breakout room.
- Take notes as you meet each other. After all one-on-one meetings are completed, you will have time to fill out the second page of your preference sheet.
- Turn in a complete packet to me with your name. This is completely confidential, and only I will have access to your notes from this 'speed-dating' activity.

Instructions for Follow-up After Groups are Formed

- Acknowledge that students may have different expectations for collaboration. Encourage or require groups to establish early ground rules and priorities. We suggest something like the "Rules, Routines, and Expectations" questionnaire. Let students know that violations in the agreed-upon rules may result in a "break up" with the violating person being asked to leave the group.
- Create private group spaces within the Learning Management System for discussions, file sharing, virtual meeting room links, etc. If you give each group their own synchronous meeting link, remember to enable screen sharing for participants.
- Require regular teacher-group conferences throughout the project to help with managing group progress and dynamics.
- Consider requiring peer and self-evaluation at the end of the project and grading for individual contribution. Assessing a single grade for the group can give unearned credit to social loafers and underperformers or lower grades for students who went above and beyond for the group.

Finally, the "speed-dating" activity may need to be broken into multiple classes to allow for practice and questions about the process, especially in 50-min classes.

“Speed-Dating” Activity Preference Sheets for Students

Classmate's Name (First Name, Last Initial)	Want to work with? (Yes/No/Maybe)	Notes (e.g., topic idea, general interests)

Classmate's Name (First Name, Last Initial)	Want to work with? (Yes/No/Maybe)	Notes (e.g., topic idea, general interests)

Tell me your top-four choices for who you would like to work with on the group project.

1. Based on the “speed-dating” activity, which classmate would you most like to work with? Why?
2. Which classmate would be your second choice to work with? Why?
3. Which classmate would be your third choice to work with? Why?
4. Which classmate would be your fourth choice to work with? Why?

Tell me up to four people you would not like to work with on the group project. For why, please be respectful to your classmates.

5. Which classmate would you least like to work with? Why?
6. Which classmate would be your next to last choice to work with? Why?
7. Which classmate would be your third to last choice to work with? Why?
8. Which classmate would be your fourth to last choice to work with? Why?